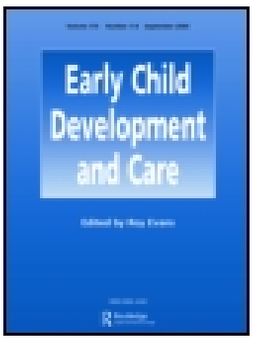

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'Cinderella did not speak up': critical literacy approach using folk/fairy tales and their parodies in an early childhood classroom

Su-Jeong Wee[a], Kyoung Jin Kim[b] and Youngmi Lee[c]

[a]Department of Behavioral Sciences, Human Development and Family Studies Program, Purdue University Northwest, Hammond, IN, USA; [b]Department of Early Childhood Education, Wheelock College, Boston, MA, USA; [c]Department of Early Childhood Education, Hanyang Women's University, Seoul, Korea

ABSTRACT

This qualitative study examined a class of 20 five-year-old Korean children's literary sessions that were composed of whole-group read-alouds of fairy/folk tales and their parodies, including discussion and follow-up activities based on critical literacy practices. Over a 15-week period, multiple sources of data including observations, open-ended interviews, written materials, and children's artifacts were collected. We found that these literary sessions based on a critical literacy approach helped the children (1) perceive the stories from different/multiple perspectives, (2) challenge stereotypes, and (3) confront the dominant social ideology/norms. The findings of the study add several important implications for implementing critical literacy in early childhood classrooms, which apply to the teachers' questions and selection of books, as well as the system and consistency of instruction.

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Parody; critical literacy; stereotypes; gender; Korean

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Critical literacy for children's critical thinking

Contrary to traditional literature instruction that often follows a text-centered model (Newell & Durst, 1993) and leads to one correct meaning (Rosenblatt, 1983), critical literary focuses on promoting children's active participation and critical examination 'in a democratic enterprise of negotiating meaning' (Pradl, 1996, p. ix). Critical literacy uses literacy practices as a medium to enable children of any age, experience, or ability level to examine and challenge issues of social justice and equity, such as power, race, class, and gender, as well as the ideologies of the texts (Janks, 2010, 2013). Such practices can promote reflection, transformative change, and social action (Hadjioannou & Fu, 2007; Norris, Lucas, & Prudhoe, 2012).

By encouraging critical reflection and active participation, critical literacy has been known to help readers get involved in thinking beyond the text to understand issues such as why a certain topic was chosen by the author, why a particular perspective was taken, and why some ideas about the topic were selected to be included/excluded (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004). Such scrutinization can help young readers develop a sense that reading is never neutral but always bases decision-making on a particular ideology (Beck, 2005). Therefore, through a critical literacy approach, children explore diverse voices and think critically about real-life problems (Fisher, 2008; Vasquez & Felderman, 2012) and discover alternative paths for self and social development (Dozier, Johnston, & Rogers, 2006; Lewison, Flint, & Van Sluys, 2002; McLaren, 2003).

Although the importance of critical literacy has been recognized in academia, its application in early childhood classrooms has been rare. Lewison et al. (2002) pointed out that generally classroom

CONTACT Su-Jeong Wee wees@pnw.edu Department of Behavioral Sciences, Human Development and Family Studies Program, Purdue University Northwest, 2200 169th street, Hammond, IN 46323, USA

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teachers neither have much knowledge in critical literacy nor clearly understand how it would work in their classrooms. Lee (2011) also stressed that pre-service and in-service teachers often conceive of critical literacy simply as critical thinking rather than realizing it as an instructional strategy. Moreover, Stribling (2014) argued that, in spite of the assumption that kindergarten students are too young to discuss the stereotypes and ideologies that provide the basis for social inequalities, the socio-cultural life experiences that children bring to the classroom can impact their engagement with critical literacy.

Parodies for critical literacy

Critical literacy is oriented to questioning and challenging the often taken-for-granted meanings and assumptions found in everyday texts, to making the familiar strange (Teo, 2014). In this sense, *parody*, characterized as 'recreating new things from a different perspective that is outside of perceived notions' (Kim, 2007, p. 13) can be a useful method for promoting children's critical literacy practices.

Parodies usually deconstruct the story contents by reorganizing the embodied meaning (Kim, 2015), which provides an opportunity for children to interpret or reinterpret meanings from different and critical perspectives (Kim, 2007). Thus, parodies can help young children identify and challenge the stereotypes imbedded in the text that have been taken for granted (Kim, 2015), and analyze a targeted media text and ideology (Gray, 2005). Parody exhibits several characteristics that make it an excellent medium for promoting critical literacy: providing a different perspective for the original story (Ahn, 2004; Na, 2004; Yun, 2013) and resisting the societal customs, and breaking stereotypes (Kim, 2007; Youm, 2008). Harwood (2011) mentioned that parody can be used as an instructional strategy to develop critical literacy, but efforts to examine its use, especially in connection to critical literacy in early childhood classrooms, have been rare in any country.

Hence, this study aims to explore how a critical literacy approach to reading, discussing, and engaging in activities for fairy/folk tales and their parodies can help young children develop critical thinking abilities and challenge social norms and stereotypes. This study addresses two research questions: (1) how does a critical literacy approach using fairy/folk tales and their parodies help children deconstruct texts and foster their critical thinking? and (2) how does a critical literacy approach using fairy/folk tales and their parodies help children challenge social norms and stereotypes? The purpose of this study is to provide insights into how educators can create learning environments where young children can deconstruct and comprehend texts using critical-thinking skills guided by the critical literacy approach.

Theoretical framework

To answer the research questions, we adopted the sociocultural theory. This theory considers language as a social practice through which we understand and construct the world (Knobel & Healey, 1998). A sociocultural approach to literacy learning recognizes and builds on each child's own foundation of literacy knowledge (Barratt-Pugh, Rivalland, Hamer, & Adams, 2006). In addition, Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development (ZPD) was adopted as a means of gaining insights into children's social interactions and their development during whole-group reading activities and literary discussions. ZPD refers to 'problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers' (p. 86). According to Vygotsky (1978), intellectual work first occurs 'between people' (p. 57), and then moves to an inner plane, 'inside the child' (p. 57). This hypothesis indicates that children's learning always occurs within their social contexts by their participation in everyday social and cultural activities with their community members (Hymes, 2001). Thus, based on sociocultural theory, literacy was considered as a socially constructed practice that children learn through their active participation in a range of contexts.

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Methods

Qualitative research methods were used in this study in order to (1) capture the complexity of the children's interactions using critical literacy practices and (2) gain an in-depth understanding of their interactions with the texts, teachers, and peers.

Research setting and participants

The present study took place in a classroom of five-year-olds at a private early childcare center named the Dreamland, located in a metropolitan city in Korea (note: all names used in this study are pseudonyms). The Dreamland served children of ages three to five, employing the Nuri curriculum. The Nuri curriculum, which is the Korean national curriculum for three to five-year-olds, aims to promote the holistic development of young children (Korea Institute of Child Care and Education [KICCE], 2013).

The Dreamland Childcare Center was contacted to ask their willingness to participate in the study, and after the director consented, a participating teacher was sought. Out of a total of seven classes at the Dreamland, Ms. Koo's five-year-old class was selected because she not only volunteered to participate but also was particularly interested in using various types of literature and helping the children develop critical thinking. During the interview, Ms. Koo acknowledged the importance of read-alouds in collaborative learning and the inquiry process, based on the sociocultural frame, and described her efforts to enhance her children's comprehension skills and critical thinking. In her mid-30s, she had a total of 10 years of teaching experience in early childhood classrooms, with an educational background in early childhood education and an early childhood teaching certificate in Korea.

A total of 20 five-year-olds (10 boys and 10 girls) participated in large-group literary sessions composed of reading, discussions, and various follow-up activities. All of the parents consented to their children's participation in this project. All of the children were of Korean ethnicity and came from middle to upper-middle-class families. All were typically developed, without any diagnosed special needs. The children's first language was Korean, and all instructions were given and activities conducted in Korean.

Research procedure

With the background of critical thinking and early literacy, we as researchers attempted to provide opportunities for young children to critically examine concepts embedded in the text that have been taken for granted. Furthermore, admitting that teaching literacy is a political practice (Luke, 1988), we felt that participating children with the homogenous ethnic background and affluent socioeconomic status needed opportunities that could impact how they perceive the world around them, going beyond the basic reading instruction, through critical literacy approach.

Over the five-month observational period, Ms. Koo read 16 children's picture books, including seven children's fairy/folk tales and nine parodies of them (See Table 1), during the whole-group literary sessions. These books were selected through collaboration between the researchers and the teacher to facilitate children to see characters and events from multiple perspectives and provided stereotypical situations, including gender, power, and economic status. Some fairy/folk tales had several different parody versions, and we included all of them in order to help the children understand that even parodies varied with different authors and perspectives. The reading sequence was decided on the basis of the children's familiarity with the books and the content difficulty.

Ms. Koo received training by the researchers composed of four two-hour sessions spread over four weeks. The training focused on the critical literacy approach, parody as a genre, the teacher's role as the facilitator of critical thinking, and specific instructional strategies such as juxtaposing texts, supplying alternative endings, interacting with the children, and critical questioning resonating with Simpson's work (1996).

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Table 1. Selected Literature.

Original Book	Parody Book
Cinderella [신데렐라] (Perrault, 2007, Woongjin Think House, Korea)	새엄마가 들려주는 신데렐라 이야기 [Seriously, Cinderella is so Annoying!: The Story of Cinderella as Told by the Wicked Stepmother] (Shaskan, 2014a, Kids M, Korea)
Three Little Pigs [아기 돼지 삼형제] (Jacobs, 2008, Woongjin Think House, Korea)	아기 늑대 세마리와 못된 돼지 [The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig] (Oxenbury, 2006, Neverland, Korea) 늑대가 들려주는 아기 돼지 삼형제 이야기 [The True Story of the Three Little Pigs] (Sciezka, 2008, Borim, Korea)
Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs [백설공주] (Grim, 2009, Samsung, Korea)	난장이가 들려주는 백설공주 이야기 [Seriously, Snow White Was So Forgetful!: The Story of Snow White as Told by the Dwarves] (Loewen, 2015a, Kids M, Korea) 말괄량이 백설공주와 뽐내기 왕자 [Tomboy Snow White and Stylish Prince] (Koo & Cho, 2013, Olive M & B, Korea)
Hansel and Gretel [헨젤과 그레텔] (Grim & Grim, 2014, World Best, Korea).	진짜 헨젤과 그레텔 이야기 [True Story of Hansel and Gretel] (Schwartz, 2010, Chungaram Media, Korea)
Red Riding Hood [빨간 모자] (Grim, 2015, Samsung, Korea)	늑대가 들려주는 빨간 모자 이야기 [Honestly, Red Riding Hood was Rotten!: The Story of Little Red Riding Hood as told by the wolf] (Shaskan, 2014b, Kids M, Korea)
Jack and Beanstalk [잭과 콩나무] (Jacobs, 2015, Samsung, Korea)	거인이 들려주는 잭과 콩나무 이야기 [Trust me, Jack's Beanstalk Stinks!: The Story of Jack and Beanstalk as Told by the Giant] (Braun, 2014, Kids M, Korea)
The Three Bears [곰 세마리] (Galdone, 2004, Borim, Korea)	아기 곰이 들려주는 골디락과 곰세마리 이야기 [Believe me, Goldilocks Rocks!: The Story of the Three Bears as Told by Baby Bear] (Loewen, 2015b, Kids M, Korea)

During and after reading the books, Ms. Koo asked probing questions like why a character acted or felt in a certain way and what other characters might feel in the same situation, to encourage the children to be actively involved in the reading and to share their thoughts. Various types of activities followed, including making their own parody stories, creating cover pages of them, role-playing, and making a Venn diagram between an original and its parody. The entire process of reading and follow-up activities for each book took approximately 45 minutes.

Data collection

Multiple data sources were used including (1) video recordings of the class activities, (2) interviews with the children and teacher, (3) children's artifacts (drawings and writings), (4) observational field notes, and (5) an informal notebook including memos. The story activities, including the discussions and follow-ups, were observed and videoed approximately once a week during the five months. All of the recordings were transcribed right after the observation sessions to be fresh in the researchers' minds. Furthermore, field notes taken during each observation captured even subtle details, including facial expressions and physical gestures of the participants. More details were added immediately after each observation by considering different types of information, such as the artifacts made by the children during the follow-up activities.

The teacher and children were interviewed, and the interviews were audio-recorded with permission. Two formal 40-minute interviews were conducted with Ms. Koo, focusing on her teaching philosophy, experience in critical literacy practices, and goal of reading parodies to her students. All interview questions were open-ended and developed in advance. Informal interviews with the teacher were carried out often, whenever questions about the activities or teacher-children interactions came up. Informal interviews with the children were conducted randomly during or immediately after the parody story activities. Questions were asked such as 'What parody story do you like most?' and 'Which one do you enjoy more between the original story and its parody story? Why?' In addition to the observations and interviews, copies of materials drawn and written by the children related to the research project were collected.

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Data analysis

The analysis was conducted in three phases, adopting Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw's (1996) coding methods. In the first phase, a preliminary coding was performed of all of the collected data. For example, while transcribing the interviews and writing up the field notes, we organized the raw data and created preliminary words or phrases by simply identifying themes and creating labels (e.g. *multiple perspectives, stereotypes, empathy*, and *gender*). Agreement was reached about the preliminary codes through triangulation (discussions among the researchers) to verify and validate the data analysis (Golafshani, 2003).

In the second phase, an analytic coding was conducted. Meaningful episodes from each literacy activity were grouped and given descriptive codes. The transcripts were read repeatedly, and the codes identified in the first phase were refined, relabelled, and subsumed. We found some core themes (e.g. *perspectives, stereotypes, social norms, and power*) and investigated how a selected theme was related to other themes. Then the transcripts were sorted on the basis of these themes. The children's drawings and writings were analyzed by the same process.

In the third phase, comparative methods were employed among the different data sources in order to check the consistency of the information. The codes from the class observations, interviews, and children's artifacts were compared for consistency. For example, the transcripts of the literary sessions and corresponding children's drawings and writings were grouped, and compared to the themes generated in the previous phases. In addition, a member check (Kirk & Miller, 1986) was conducted through sharing our analysis with other professionals in the fields of early childhood and literacy education to confirm the validity of the categories and themes that emerged and to avoid a biased understanding. Exchanging ideas enabled a deeper consideration of the data as well as an analysis that provided alternative interpretations.

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Findings

Over the 15 weeks of participation in literary sessions with reading, discussions, and follow-up activities about fairy/folk tales and their parodies, we found the children improved in their understanding and ability to (1) perceive a story from different/multiple perspectives, (2) challenge stereotypes, and (3) confront the dominant social ideology/norms.

Perceiving the story from different/multiple perspectives

Since young children of age four to five are genuinely self-centered (Borke, 1975), it is considered challenging for them to use metacognition, i.e. knowing what others think, from a developmental point of view. However, some scholars have argued that children have some knowledge about their own thinking and can project that knowledge onto others to explain how others think and know things (Kuhn, 2000; Larkin, 2010). At the beginning of the observation, most of the children were confused about the different versions of the story told by different narrators. Oftentimes, they were stuck in the original fairy/folk tales and had difficulty viewing them from different perspectives. The children tended to think from their own point of view, not from a character's or narrator's. However, they gradually got to understand a new setting and version of a story told by a different narrator. The following vignette shows the children engaged in exploring different perspectives after reading a parody of Cinderella titled *새엄마가 들려주는 신데렐라 이야기* [*Seriously, Cinderella is So Annoying!: The Story of Cinderella as Told by the Wicked Stepmother*] (Shaskan, 2014a):

Teacher: What was The Story of Cinderella as Told by the Wicked Stepmother about?
Seyoon: It's a story told by a stepmother.
Teacher: How was it different from the original story? Who was the most important character in this story?
Seoyoon: The stepmother.
Teacher: Right. This story was recreated centering on the stepmother. And what's the biggest change?

Gunwoo: The stepmother became nice.
Teacher: Why do you think that?
Gunwoo: Because she did not have Cinderella clean and do laundry.
Seoyoon: Because she did not say 'Cinderella, do this!' in a strong and scary voice.
Jiwoo: The original story did not tell us why the stepmother made Cinderella work, but in the parody story, the stepmother told us what we did not know.
Teacher: What didn't we know?
Jiwoo: I did not know Cinderella was talkative and why she couldn't go to the party.
Minji: I thought Cinderella did not go to the party because she had lots of work to do and did not have a beautiful dress to wear, but the stepmother said she couldn't go because of her sore throat.
Sungwoo: Oh, maybe … the stepmother made up a story to make her look nice.
Teacher: That sounds interesting. But she might think that way from her perspective.

As seen in the vignette above, the children were able to point out the differences in perspective between the original and parody stories. Furthermore, they realized that according to the narrator, the story could be completely different and reveal something that they did not know. With the teacher's guided questions that encouraged the children to think from multiple perspectives and with the meaningful exchanges of their different ideas, the children gradually came up with unconventional and creative ideas. The children showed a developed understanding about the stepmother's intentions and stepsisters' actions, and reinterpreted the characters. In addition, the children joined together in creating a Cinderella song from the stepmother's viewpoint.

Furthermore, the children discussed what other perspectives could be taken to tell the story, besides the one introduced in the parody. For example, after reading a parody of Snow White titled 난장이가 들려주는 백설공주 이야기 [*Seriously, Snow White Was So Forgetful!: The Story of Snow White as Told by the Dwarves*] (Loewen, 2015a), the teacher asked who else could tell the story besides the dwarves. The children answered that the king, Snow White, the queen, and the prince all could. Then they discussed, if the story was told by the queen, what she would like to tell. One child recreated a story in which all of the queen's misdeeds to Snow White were mistakes: the queen intended to give Snow White a pretty comb with magical hair cream that made dreams come true, but she accidently handed a poisoned comb and apple to Snow White instead.

Inspired by such discussions and the recreation of stories from different perspectives, the children were offered time to create their own parodies. Along with the story, the children created a cover page that included the title of the book, an illustration, and a brief synopsis. As the examples in Figure 1 show, the children produced the titles of their parody of Cinderella and explained why they chose such titles. These samples included the children's unique lens, such as trying to hear the stepmother's feelings, and revealing Cinderella's true colours as being disobedient. These samples showed that children broke absolutism of the good and bad characters, represented as Cinderella and her stepmother by switching perspectives.

Ms. Koo reported during an interview that in the beginning the children had a hard time taking different perspectives due to their familiarity with the folk/fairy tales. However, providing continuous and connected activities, such as original fairy/folk story reading, discussion, parody song making, and creating their own parody with a cover page and a title, seemed to help them switch to another perspective. Furthermore, having the children engage socially in the exchange of opinions enabled them to consider different views and have more flexible thinking.

Challenging stereotypes

Stereotypes are thoughts that can be adopted about specific types of individuals or certain ways of doing things (McGarty, Yzerbyt, & Spears, 2002). These thoughts or beliefs may or may not accurately reflect reality (Cox, Abramson, Devine, & Hollon, 2012; Judd & Park, 1993). Even young children can have stereotyped ideas about certain animals and people. Children in this study were found to have stereotypes of wolves and stepmothers, possibly because the majority of the fairy/folk tales read during the literary sessions (e.g. *Three Little Pigs, Snow White, Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding*

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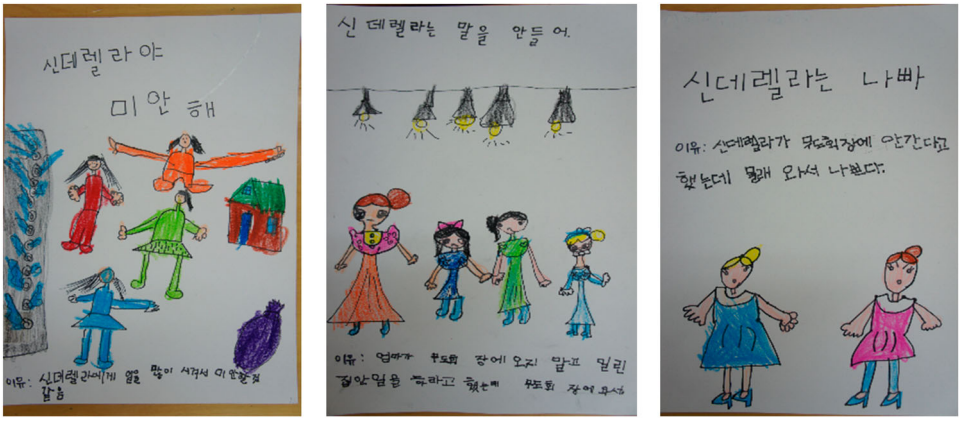

Title: Sorry, Cinderella.
Reason: They may feel sorry since they had Cinderella work so much.

Title: Cinderella doesn't listen!
Reason: Cinderella came to the party although stepmother told her not to come and do house chores.

Title: Cinderella is naughty.
Reason: Cinderella said she would not go to the party but she did.

Figure 1. Cover pages of children's own parodies of *Cinderella*.

Hood, and *Cinderella*) described these characters as being mean or greedy. However, the parody literary sessions led the children to challenge such stereotypes and facilitated their critical thinking. The following example shows how the children confronted the stereotypical ideas about Cinderella, her stepmother, and her stepsisters after reading *Cinderella* and its parody, *새엄마가 들려주는 신데렐라 이야기* [*Seriously, Cinderella is So Annoying!*] (Shaskan, 2014a).

Teacher:	What do you think about Cinderella in the original story?
Seoyeon:	I think she is kind.
Teacher:	Why do you think that?
Seoyeon:	Because a fairy said so.
Jinseo:	She did all the hard work that her stepmother and stepsisters asked her.
Teacher:	Is there anyone who thinks, 'No, I don't think that way'? Although Cinderella did all the work with kindness, was she happy?
Sunghyun:	No, she was annoyed.
Teacher:	Why was she annoyed?
Sunghyun:	Because she was asked to do lots of hard work.
Seoyeon:	She might be very sad.
Teacher:	Why?
Seoyeon:	Because her stepsisters did nothing and only Cinderella did all the work.
Teacher:	When her stepmother asked her to do the house chores and not go to the party, why didn't Cinderella say anything? How might she have felt?
Children:	She might have felt very sad because she wanted to go to the party.
Teacher:	Then why didn't Cinderella say that she wanted to go?
Jinseo:	She felt scared of being punished by her stepsisters and stepmother.
Teacher:	So Cinderella didn't go to the party?
Children:	No, she went to the party.
Teacher:	What do you think about it?
Jian:	Cinderella was bad because she did not listen to her stepmother.
Jimin:	She lied.
Teacher:	Okay, then let's talk about the stepmother and stepsisters. What do you think about them?
Gunwoo:	The stepmother made Cinderella do lots of work while spoiling her own daughters.
Teacher:	Well, do you think there are other reasons the stepmother made Cinderella work, besides Cinderella being her stepdaughter?
Yoonchan:	Because Cinderella was too nice, and she did all the work asked of her.

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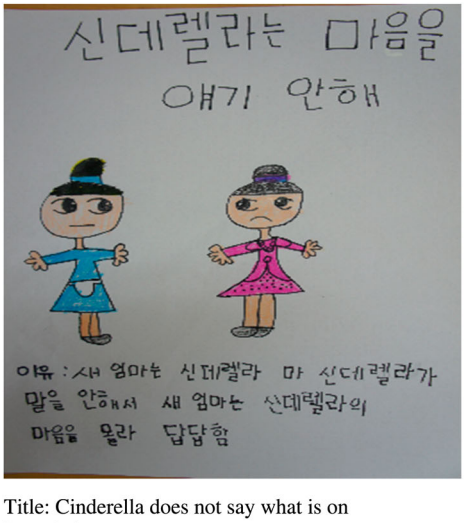
Gunwoo:	The stepsisters said they did not want to do [the work], but Cinderella did not say anything.
Teacher:	If Cinderella said she didn't want to do it, her stepmother would stop asking her. Any other ideas?
Doyoung:	The stepsisters had done lots of work before coming to Cinderella's house.
Teacher:	Then how would the stepmother feel when she saw Cinderella at the party?
Jian:	When Cinderella was not there, the stepmother felt happy, but when she saw Cinderella, she felt bad.
Teacher:	Why do you think she felt bad?
Jian:	Because Cinderella lied. She said, 'Yes, mother, I will stay home and do the housework'; but she went to the party.
Teacher:	We thought that Cinderella was always nice and that her stepmother and sisters were bad. Have your ideas about them changed after talking with the class during this story time?
Gunwoo:	I thought in different ways and got new ideas. Her stepmother and sisters were not necessarily bad.

In the beginning, the children firmly believed without much critical thinking that Cinderella was nice, just because the 'fairy said so.' However, with the teacher's guided questions, the children shared their ideas about why they had thought Cinderella was good and the stepmother and stepsisters scary and mean, and what made Cinderella do all the house chores, while her stepsisters did not. The discussion about Cinderella and her stepfamily provided opportunities for the children to avoid the overgeneralized ideas about stepmothers and stepsisters. Instead, the children pondered the intentions behind the actions by considering various situations that the characters were involved in. Not only through the discussions but also through the drawings, the children expressed their changed ideas toward the stepmothers in *Cinderella* and *Hansel and Gretel* as presented in Figure 2.

In the case of the drawings for the *Cinderella* parody, the stepmother was described not as a mean and evil person, but as one who cared about Cinderella and wanted to know her mind. One child reinterpreted the reason why the stepmother in *Hansel and Gretel* let them go outside: Since Hansel and Gretel usually ate a lot, they did not have enough food, and the stepmother thought they could get filled up on a gingerbread house in the woods that was covered with sweets. The children broke their stereotypes and were open to considering the possibility that a good character may have committed misconduct, by trying to interpret characters' intentions and actions from unconventional angles.



Title: Cinderella does not say what is on her mind.
Reason: Because Cinderella did not talk openly, stepmother did not know what was on her mind.

Title: Stepmother felt strange
Reason: She let the kids go outside because they ate too much but people thought she was evil.

Figure 2. Children's drawings of their parodies of *Cinderella* and *Hansel and Gretel*.

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Confronting the dominant social ideology and gender norms

Traditional gender roles were prevalent in original fairy/folk tales. For example, females in *Cinderella* and *Snow White* were typically described as dependent, quiet, and feminine, while males were portrayed as brave, masculine, and active (Peterson & Lach, 1990). However, reading and discussing stories with un-sexist content provided opportunities for the children to learn about and challenge the dominant social norms, especially relating to gender roles. In the following scene we find the children recognizing and confronting the stereotypical gender roles when they discussed 말괄량이 백설공주와 뽐내기 왕자 [*Tomboy Snow White and Stylish Prince*] (Koo & Cho, 2013).

Teacher:	How was the princess in the original story different from the one in the parody story?
Seoyoon:	The princess in the original story was kind and calm.
Doyoung:	She always wore a dress and looked pretty.
Jinseo:	She was quiet and a coward.
Teacher:	Then how about the princess in the parody story?
Sungwoo:	She insisted on wearing pants.
Teacher:	Why did she want to wear pants?
Sungwoo:	Because she wanted to be a boy!
Teacher:	Why did she want to be a boy?
Chaeun:	Because she wanted to ride a horse or do more interesting things guys do.
Kijeong:	Because she thought she couldn't do things that only boys could do.
Teacher:	What are the things that only boys could do? Are there such things?
Children:	No.
Teacher:	Then why did the princess think only boys could do something?
Chaeyoon:	She thought there were separate things only boys could do or only girls could do but actually there are no such things.
Teacher:	How about you? Do you think that there are kinds of playing that only boys can do or only girls can do?
Children:	No!
Teacher:	Do you think there are some kinds of playing that girls like or boys like?
Sungwoo:	Girls like to draw pictures.
Teacher:	How about boys?
Sungwoo:	Boys like to build towers and houses with blocks.
Teacher:	Yes, in our classroom, boys do block play, making towers and houses more often than girls, and girls are found more easily in the art area. Why do you think it happens? Can't girl play with blocks?
Jisoo:	Each person likes to do different things.
Sungwoo:	Then if boys like art, they can do art, too.
Teacher:	Sure.

The children engaged in a discussion about social expectations toward gender, challenged traditional gender roles, and learned about gender inequality. Specifically, through social interactions with their peers and the teacher, the children contemplated why the princess wanted to become a boy and why the prince wanted to be a girl. They continued to think about whether there was a certain kind of playing that only boys or only girls could do. The discussion moved to what girls and boys typically liked to play at, and expanded to what if boys liked to do what the girls usually did. The children shared that regardless of gender, people could do whatever they wanted. Furthermore, the children had the chance to think about how they would respond when confronted by traditional social norms, and said what they would do in the princess' or prince's place. The children's responses to the traditional gender roles are presented in Figure 3.

The children's responses to the remark that the princess 'should behave like a lady' varied. One was 'Why should a girl be quiet all the time? Girls can be masculine.' With respect to the traditional ways princes should think, such as 'Being stylish is something only girls do,' the children filled out speech bubbles as follows: 'I want to be fashionable rather than being brave'; 'Why should a prince do sword fighting? Do guys have separate things to do?'; and 'That's what I want to do. Men and women can do the same thing.' Going beyond passive recognition of problematic situations involving gender inequality and stereotypes, the children actively expressed their opinions on how to

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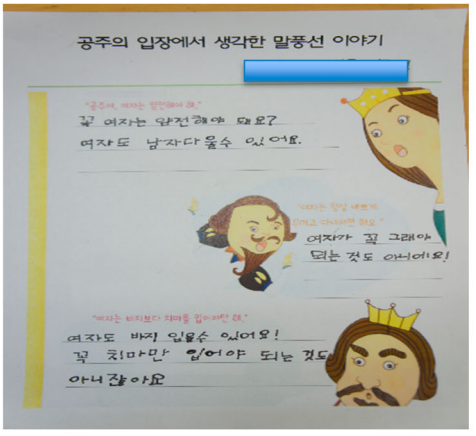

A Princess' Thinking Bubbles
"Why should only girls be quiet and gentle?" "Girls don't always need to be so" "Girls can wear pants. They don't need to wear dresses all the time."

A Prince's Thinking Bubbles
"I like to be fashionable rather than be brave." "I don't need to exercise. I can eat vegetable. Boys can be fat." "Boys can be stylish, too. Really."

Figure 3. Children's responses to the traditional gender roles.

respond when they are faced with unequal treatment. These experiences helped them disrupt traditional conceptions about gender and develop attitudes of gender equality.

Discussion

This study examined how reading and discussing fairy/folk tales and their parodies helped children develop critical perspectives and challenge dominant social norms and stereotypes. Ms. Koo reported during an interview that the children did not seem to enjoy parodies much in the beginning, because they thought the characters were simply making excuses or fabricating stories after doing wrong. However, Ms. Koo observed that the parodies became understandable to the children, and that they were useful in teaching critical thinking toward conventional ideas and traditional gender roles; furthermore, the children got intrigued by the unexpected story developments.

In considering the literary sessions using parodies, this section will highlight the children's reinterpretation and reconstruction of the story meanings with critical and logical thinking skills, their perceptions of the stories from multiple perspectives, and their confrontation with stereotypes and traditional gender roles. The teacher's role in making parody activities more meaningful and effective in the early childhood classroom is also addressed.

Parodies for developing children's critical and logical thinking

Critical literacy is concerned about identifying unequal power relationships and serving social justice, rather than being primarily interested in critical thinking per se (Lewison, Leland, & Harste, 2008). However, critical thinking and critical literacy overlap in certain aspects (Lee, 2011). For example, the children in this study used critical and logical thinking abilities in order to uncover social stereotypes and prejudice embedded in the stories. They questioned what they had taken for granted and thus what they had not paid attention to before, by being asked thought-provoking questions such as 'Why did the queen from *Snow White* pursue beauty so much?' and 'If Snow White were not pretty, would the dwarves have accepted her?' The children were engaged in problem-solving and exchanging their ideas in a whole-class setting, which facilitated their critical thinking abilities, as supported by sociocultural theory.

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Prior to introducing the parodies, Ms. Koo read and discussed the original stories, although most of the children already knew them. Following such a sequence is crucial because creating a parody should be based on a familiarity with the meaning and style of the original (Shelton, 2014). Comparing and contrasting the originals with the parodies provided the chance to execute analytical and logical thinking and overcome a dichotomous way of thinking. This method and finding was supported by Ahn (2004), who found that exploring the differences between original stories and their parodies led to higher-order thinking, as reading and remembering the original stories enabled the children to analyze the characters from a fresh perspective and reinterpret their intentions and actions.

Moreover, while reading the parody stories, the children were encouraged to think critically by making inferences and predictions, which are important skills for reading comprehension and literary criticism (Kispal, 2008). The children inferred the flow of storylines using their logical and critical thinking, based on information they had. For example, the children were asked to predict what would happen next in a story or what the title of a story would be by only seeing the cover of the book. Several scholars have emphasized the importance of teachers' questions for critical thinking (Harwood, 2011; Kispal, 2008). In this study, Ms. Koo encouraged the children to reflect on why they thought in certain ways using various prompts, such as 'What if … ?' and 'How do you know?' as well as questions about relationships among characters, goals and motivations.

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Parodies for taking different perspectives

Critical literacy can provide fresh and diverse lenses for understanding and exploring different experiences and multiple points of view (Bainbridge, Malicky, & Payne, 2004). In this study, parody was the medium used to help children understand different perspectives. In the beginning of the programme, the children were familiar with the original stories and had difficulties in perceiving the stories through different lenses, which followed the 'authority of rules' (Bourke, 2008, p. 309). In addition, as the interview with the teacher revealed, the children did not seem to enjoy parody in the beginning because it clashed with what they had thought. Despite the difficulties, we found that the teacher's well-planned series of activities, including reading an original fairy/folk tale, having a discussion, making a parody song, and creating their own parody with a cover page and a title, helped the children practice switching their views more flexibly and see things from different perspectives. Shelton (2014) stressed that '*creating* and *imagining* parodies becomes a learning experience' (italicized in original text) while 'reading and watching parodies is entertaining' (p. 12), which implies the importance for learning of direct involvement. The children's involvement in creating their own parody story helped them take different perspectives from the original story and recognize others' points of view, supporting their own thoughts with reasons. The children's meaning-making was constructed within a social realm, and these practices helped them become flexible and escape self-centeredness.

Parodies for challenging the dominant social norms and stereotypes

Critical literacy can help children discover social inequity and injustice, consider social and political realities, and not blindly accept the prevalent practices and beliefs without thinking or questioning (Comber & Simpson, 2001; Kuby, 2013). It also reveals the effects of socio-political and power relationships in guiding our behaviours and awareness (Bainbridge et al., 2004; Harwood, 2011). In this study, the children posed questions about and challenged the stereotypes with which the authors intended to influence their readers' minds. The teacher's questioning techniques played significant roles in revealing the children's stereotypes about characters and gender roles and facilitating their critical thinking. Ms. Koo asked the children to explain 'how they know,' provided them with time to think about the reasons for their statements, and enabled them to compare different ideas. The teacher encouraged the children to clarify their ideas, challenged their thinking, and made it clear

that they should evaluate the evidence given for claims rather than just the claims themselves. Such practices helped the children to be open-minded and flexible as well as critical, escaping from black-or-white reasoning. Bourke (2008) supported teachers' trials to help equip children with a critical lens in order to confront pervasive constructions of the concepts by providing multiple versions of the fairy tales and teaching how to argue with the texts. Thus, the critical literacy practice helped the children pay attention to people who were marginalized and stereotyped, and challenged their thinking through questioning and exploring various viewpoints and social and political issues.

Implications and limitations

In this study, we used fairy/folk tales and parodies of them as a medium for examining the critical literacy approach. We found that the participating children could accept multiple perspectives and consider the characters in ways not highlighted in the original story, and thereby they learned to challenge the socially dominant ideas and gender stereotypes. This section will highlight the implications and make suggestions for teachers in early childhood classrooms for facilitating children's critical literacy abilities and critical thinking, as well as addressing a limitation of the study.

First, it is important for teachers to ask critical questions and pay attention to how they interact with young children. Critical questions enable the children to examine their own insights and those presented in texts. Educators need to encourage children to challenge their own assumptions and prejudices about the status quo and gender roles, asking questions such as 'Whose voice dominates, and whose voice is marginalized?'; 'What does the text say about boys/girls?'; and 'Is it important that the main character is beautiful?' (Harwood, 2011). Such conversations help children see how certain knowledge or understanding held by a particular group is valued within a text, while the values of other groups are overlooked (Simpson, 1996). Moreover, critical connections in texts enable children to develop reading and thinking skills that can lead to powerful insights into how the texts work and where the children fit in the social world that surrounds them (Chafel, Flint, Hammel, & Pomeroy, 2007). Simpson (1996) also stressed that when children question texts connecting to their experiences and beliefs, they could be more deeply engaged in critique and analysis. Thus, it is important for educators to guide children's own interests and questions in critical ways and offer series of literacy activities that encourage children to 'perceive critically the way they exist in the world in which they find themselves' (Freire, 2000, p. 83).

Second, teachers should pay attention to their selection of books for the critical literacy approach. Traditional books seldom address social issues of interest or importance to children (Meller, Richardson, & Hatch, 2009), which can make it challenging for the teachers to discuss inequality and the status quo. Harste (2000) suggested that teachers should select books that enable the children to explore differences, enrich their understanding of traditionally marginalized people, and show how people can begin to take action on important social issues. However, teachers do not always need to limit their selection of books to the ones that involve social issues. Bourke's study (2008) showed a great example of how fairy tales could be used to operate critical literacy to first-grade students. When teachers use traditional books, they can still ask critical questions like those presented above, as well as encourage the children to think about what is missing in the text and reconstruct the text on their own, for example, by creating an ending that reflects complex social contexts and problems, instead of 'happily ever after.'

Last, it is important to provide consistent and systematic instructions for critical literacy instead of a one-time discussion or single activity. An array of well-planned and connected activities can enrich children's understanding of social issues and deepen their critical thinking. Furthermore, teachers can encourage children to share their ideas in various forms – orally, kinesthetically, or by singing, voting, writing, or drawing. Such a variety of forms for sharing their ideas can accelerate social interactions, which can in turn lead to modifying, fine-tuning, or expanding their ideas.

Despite the important insights gained, this study has some limitations. First, the participating children were all from well-off families and had the same ethnicity, which is considered a privileged

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group that is less likely to experience discrimination, unequal treatment, and social injustice. Such children's background might have led them to more readily disrupting constructs such as gender, while having difficulty in recognizing and addressing issues like status quo and race/ethnicity. Further research is needed to better understand the instructions of Korean young children from diverse socioeconomic environments as well as their constructions of more diverse issues relating to power and social justice in the critical literacy approach. Second, almost all the fairy/folk tales and parodies (except one parody, 말괄량이 백설공주와 뽐내기 왕자) [*Tomboy Snow White and Stylish Prince*] (Koo & Cho, 2013) selected for this study were originally written by western authors, featuring White characters, which lacked a multicultural perspective or the culture of the children in the study. Such selection was mainly due to absence of availability of parodies that included characters with diverse backgrounds or multicultural perspectives written by Korean authors or even in translated versions. We acknowledge the great importance of and the need for further research on introducing books that reflect diverse contexts and cultures and integrate multicultural perspectives.

We faced challenges including having cultural gaps between the texts and participating Korean children's contexts. Stories with protagonists of Korean ethnicity or similar backgrounds living daily lives could have helped children connect to and be engaged in the stories more easily. Furthermore, at times the teacher had a difficult time in generating critical questions in order to turn children's attentions to the areas of races and different socioeconomic positions. Continuing professional development programme is required to assist in-service and pre-service teachers to be capable of addressing more diverse and critical issues, such as ideologies of religion, justice, ethics, and individual and societal responsibility in early childhood classrooms.

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Notes on contributors

Dr. Su-Jeong Wee is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Development in Human Development and Family Studies program, Department of Behavioral Sciences at Purdue University Northwest. Her primary research areas include diversity, children's literature, arts in early childhood, and early childhood teacher education.

Kyoung Jin Kim is an assistant professor in Early Childhood Education at Wheelock. She teaches undergraduate and graduate courses in Early Childhood Education and supervises student teachers. Her scholarly interests include multicultural education (diversity), teacher education, professional development, quality of early childhood education, and working with family.

Dr. Youngmi Lee is an Associate Professor of Early Childhood Education in the department of Humanities and Social Development at Hanyang Women's University. Her primary research areas include children's literature, children's math, curriculum development in early childhood, and early childhood teacher education.

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